

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-20

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R 142015Z JUN 74

FM AMEMBASSY ASUNCION

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2796

INFO AMEMBASSY BRASILIA

AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

AMEMBASSY LA PAZ

AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO

USCINCSO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ASUNCION 2482/1

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, PA, AR

SUBJECT: PERON VISIT TO PARAGUAY SUCCESSFUL

REF: (A) ASUNCION 2371 - NOTAL; (B) ASUNCION 2404 - NOTAL

1. SUMMARY. PERON'S RECENT VISIT--JUNE 6-7-- WAS AS POPULAR SUCCESS AND, IN ADDITION, HAS CREATED A MORE RECEPTIVE CLIMATE WITHIN THE GOP TOWARD ARGENTINE PRETENSIONS IN PARAGUAY THAN HAS BEEN THE CASE IN RECENT YEARS. NO AGREEMENTS OF IMPORTANCE WERE REACHED. HOWEVER, PERON IS BELIEVED TO HAVE EXPLORED WITH STROESSNER GENERAL IMPROVEMENT OF RELATIONS, PARAGUAYAN SUPPORT OF ARGENTINA'S POSITION REGARDING RIGHTS OF DOWNSTREAM NATIONS PARTICULARLY IN REGARD TO THE ITAIPU AND CORPUS HYDROELECTRIC PROJECTS, AND ECONOMIC COOPERATION. THE GOP WILL REMAIN OPPOSED TO ARGENTINE ATTEMPTS TO MODIFY PLANS FOR ITAIPU'S CONSTRUCTION. IN OTHER AREAS, HOWEVER, THE GOP IS INCLINED TO BE FORTHCOMING WITH THE ARGENTINES TO MEET THE LATTERS' CONFIDENTIAL

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PERCEPTION OF THE NEED TO REDRESS THE BALANCE OF

PARAGUAYAN RELATIONS BETWEEN BRAZIL AND ARGENTINA.
END SUMMARY.

2. THE JUNE 6-7 VISIT OF PERON TO PARAGUAY WAS A PUBLIC RELATIONS SUCCESS WHICH SET THE STAGE FOR LATER SUBSTANTIVE, IF LIMITED, POLITICAL DIVIDENDS FOR ARGENTINA. THROUGHOUT, THE TRIP WAS GOOD THEATER IN WHICH A POLISHED SHOWMAN, AIDED AND ABETTED BY A VOCIFEROUS LOCAL PRESS CLAQUE, RANG ALL THE CHANGES IN PLAYING THE SENSIBILITIES OF BOTH THE PARAGUAYAN PUBLIC AND THE PARAGUAYAN PRESIDENT. PERON BILLED HIS TRIP AS A SORT OF SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY OF RETURN TO THE COUNTRY THAT HAD ONCE SHELTERED HIM IN EXILE AND AWARDED HIM HONORARY CITIZENSHIP AND AN HONORARY GENERALCY. THE PUBLIC AND PRESS RESPONDED, AND PERON'S 1953 RETURN OF TRIPLE ALLIANCE WAR TROPHIES (AS AGAINST BRAZIL'S FAILURE TO DO THE SAME) WAS LAUDED AS WAS HIS ALLEGED PARTIALITY TO PARAGUAY. THROUGHOUT MUCH OF THE PRAISE OF PERON AND EXALTATION OF FRIENDLY RELATIONS BETWEEN ARGENTINA AND PARAGUAY, THERE RAN AN UNDERCURRENT OF ANTI-BRAZILIAN SENTIMENT WHICH ALSO IS DISPLAYED HERE AS AN INDIRECT METHOD OF ATTACKING STROESSNER FOR PROMOTING CLOSE TIES WITH PARAGUAY'S LARGER NEIGHBOR, BRAZIL. THE OPPOSITION PRESS SCORED A DOUBLE BY CONTRASTING THE FREE ELECTION AND CIVILIAN SUPPORT OF PERON NOT ONLY WITH BRAZIL'S MILITARY GOVERNMENT, BUT ALSO WITH PARAGUAY'S AUTHORITARIAN REGIME. ALTHOUGH NO CONCESSIONS OR BENEFITS TO PARAGUAY WERE ANNOUNCED DURING THE VISIT, PERON SKILLFULLY AND EFFECTIVELY APPEALED DIRECTLY TO THE PERSONALITY OF STROESSNER BY INCLUDING THE THREE ARGENTINE SERVICE COMMANDERS IN HIS ENTOURAGE AND BY CONFERRING AN UNPRECEDENTED HONORARY LT. GENERALCY IN THE ARGENTINE ARMY UPON STROESSNER. ACCORDING TO THOSE CLOSE TO HIM, THIS LATTER GESTURE HAD A PROFOUND EMOTIONAL IMPACT UPON STROESSNER, ESPECIALLY SINCE IT CAME AS A COMPLETE SURPRISE (ALL REFERENCES TO THE COMMISSION HAD BEEN WITHHELD FROM ARGENTINE SPEECH TEXTS SUPPLIED IN ADVANCE TO THE GOP).

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3. FROM ALL APPEARANCES, PERON DELIBERATELY REFRAINED FROM ADVANCING ANYTHING IN THE NATURE OF CONCRETE PROPOSALS WHILE HERE, BUT RATHER, ATTEMPTED TO SET THE STAGE FOR AN EVENTUAL REDRESS OF THE BALANCE OF PARAGUAYAN RELATIONS BETWEEN ARGENTINA AND BRAZIL. ALTHOUGH SPECIFICS OF THE TWO CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN PERON AND STROESSNER ARE UNAVAILABLE, REMARKS BY MEMBERS OF THE LOWER ECHELON OF THE ARGENTINE PARTY TO PARAGUAYAN

COUNTERPARTS SUGGEST THAT PERON MAY HAVE EXPLORED THE FOLLOWING: (A) OVERALL IMPROVEMENT OF RELATIONS AND, BY IMPLICATION, LESS PARAGUAYAN FAVOR TOWARD BRAZIL, (B) PARAGUAYAN ASSISTANCE OR ACQUIESCENCE IN ARGENTINE EFFORTS TO PERSUADE BRAZIL TO MODIFY THE SPECIFICATIONS OF THE ITAIPU DAM IN ORDER TO IMPROVE THE FEASIBILITY OF THE PROPOSED DOWN-STREAM ARGENTINE-PARAGUAYAN HYDROELECTRIC PROJECT AT CORPUS, (C) SUPPORT FOR ARGENTINA'S POSITION AS OPPOSED TO BRAZIL'S ON THE RIGHT OF DOWNSTREAM NATIONS TO "PRIOR CONSULTATION" REGARDING UPSTREAM EXPLOITATION OF RIVER RESOURCES, (D) SOME FORM OF A "HYDROELECTRIC POWER UNION" OF CUENCA DEL PLATA STATES, (E) ESTABLISHMENT OF JOINT ARGENTINE-PARAGUAYAN CELLULOSE AND ALUMINUM PLANTS IN PARAGUAY, AND (F) SOME FORM OF ECONOMIC INTEGRATION.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 ASUNCION 2482/2

4. INsofar AS A "REDRESS" OF BALANCE BETWEEN ARGENTINA AND BRAZIL IN CONCERNED, THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC THREAT THAT AN UNFRIENDLY ARGENTINA HISTORICALLY HAS POSED FOR PARAGUAY SUPPLIES PERSUASIVE REASONS FOR THE GOP TO ASSUAGE ARGENTINE PERCEP-

TIONS IN THIS RESPECT. EMBASSY SOURCES HAVE INDICATED THAT WHILE THE GOP WILL CONTINUE TO OPPOSE ATTEMPTS TO MODIFY PLANS FOR ITAIPU'S CONSTRUCTION, IT WILL NEGOTIATE ON CORPUS IN GOOD FAITH AND MAY SUBSEQUENTLY PAY LIP SERVICE TO ARGENTINA'S POSITION ON THE RIGHTS OF DOWNSTREAM NATIONS. INsofar AS ECONOMIC INTEGRATION IS CONCERNED, PARAGUAYANS REGARD SUCH GENERALITIES AS UNREALISTIC BUT ARE QUITE WILLING TO CONSIDER FORMATION OF JOINT CELLULOSE AND ALUMINUM COMPANIES, OR ANY OTHER SERIOUS PROPOSALS.

5. A RECURRENT THEME IN DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN EMBOFFS AND GOF OFFICIALS RE ARGENTINE-PARAGUAYAN RELATIONS

IS THE IMPERMANENCE OF COMMITMENTS FROM A ONE-MAN
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ADMINISTRATION HEADED BY A 78-YEAR-OLD, AND FEAR THAT IT WILL SUCCEDED BY A "LEFTIST" REGIME. THE PHYSICAL APPEARANCE AND PERFORMANCE OF PERON WHILE HERE WAS NOT REASSURING. DURING HIS ARRIVAL SPEECH HIS VOICE QUAVORED AND HIS HANDS SHOOK VISIBLY. THE LOCALE OF ONE CERMONIAL EVENT WAS VETOED BY ARGENTINE ADVANCE MEN BECAUSE IT WOULD HAVE REQUIRED PERON TO ASCENT A DOUBLE FLIGHT OF STAIRS. DURING A WHITE TIE RECEPTION PERON HAD TO LEAVE THE RECEIVING LINE TO SIT AND REST AND SUBSEQUENTLY WAS UNABLE TO RETURN TO THE LINE.

6. OVERALL, PERON'S VISIT ACCOMPLISHED NEARLY ALL THAT COULD BE EXPECTED FROM AN EFFORT OF THIS KIND. PERON REASSERTED AND UNDERLINED BOTH TO THE PUBLIC AND WITHIN GOVERNMENT CIRCLES THE FUNDAMENTAL IMPORTANCE OF ARGENTINE ON THE PARAGUAYAN SCENE. HE GAVE COMFORT TO THOSE SECTORS WHO FEAR AND OPPOSE GROWING BRAZILIAN INFLUENCE. HE CREATED A MORE RECEPTIVE CLIMATE WITHIN THE GOP FOR FUTURE ARGENTINE PRETENSIONS IN PARAGUAY. HIS IMPACT WAS SUCH THAT THE EDITORS OF THE OFFICIAL NEWSPAPER, PATRIA, NORMALLY ON THE DEFENSIVE REGARDING ALLEGED GOP FAVORITISM TOWARD BRAZIL, THIS TIME FELT IMPELLED TO RUN AN EDITORIAL ASSERTING THAT GOP POLICY WAS PRO-PARAGUAYAN AND NOT PRO-ARGENTINE.
RICHARDSON

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